



outcome mapping

building learning and reflection into development programs

Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, Terry Smutylo

foreword by Michael Quinn Patton

The Challenges of Assessing Development Impacts

As development is essentially about people relating to each other and their environment, the focus of Outcome Mapping is on people and organizations. The originality of the methodology is its shift away from assessing the products of a program (e.g., policy relevance, poverty alleviation, reduced conflict) to focus on changes in behaviours, relationships, actions, and/or activities of the people and organizations with whom a development program works directly.

In its conceptual and practical work over the past few years, IDRC's Evaluation Unit has encountered fundamental challenges in assessing and reporting on development impacts. While development organizations are under pressure to demonstrate that their programs result in significant and lasting changes in the well-being of large numbers of their intended beneficiaries, such "impacts" are often the product of a confluence of events for which no single agency or group of agencies can realistically claim full credit. As a result, assessing development impacts, especially from the perspective of an external agency, is problematic. Yet many organizations continue to struggle to measure results far beyond the reach of their programs.

To address this problem, IDRC has been working with Dr Barry Kibel, of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, to adapt his Outcome Engineering approach to the development research context. Methodological collaboration with the West African Rural Foundation and testing with the Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development project and the International Model Forest Network Secretariat, have greatly informed this adaptation process. A methodology, Outcome Mapping, has evolved which characterizes and assesses the contributions development programs make to the achievement of outcomes. Outcome Mapping can be adapted for use at the project, program, or organizational levels as a monitoring system or it can be used to evaluate on-going or completed activities. It takes a learning-based and use-driven view of evaluation guided by principles of participation and iterative learning, encouraging evaluative thinking throughout the program cycle by all program team members.

This shift significantly alters the way a program understands its goals and assesses its performance and results. Outcome Mapping establishes a vision of the human, social, and environmental betterment to which the program hopes to contribute and then focuses monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within its sphere of influence. The program's contributions to development are planned and assessed based on its influence on the partners with whom it is working to effect change. At its essence, development is accomplished through changes in the behaviour of people; therefore, this is the central concept of Outcome Mapping.

Outcome Mapping: Focusing on Change in Partners

Outcome Mapping provides not only a guide to essential evaluation map-making, but also a guide to learning and increased effectiveness and affirmation that being attentive along the journey is as important, and critical to, arriving at a destination.

Michael Quinn Patton, Foreword

Outcome Mapping focuses on one particular category of results - changes in the behaviour of people, groups, and organizations with whom a program works directly. These changes are called "outcomes." Through Outcome Mapping, development programs can claim contributions to the achievement of outcomes rather than claiming the achievement of development impacts. Although these outcomes, in turn, enhance the possibility of development impacts, the relationship is not necessarily one of direct cause and effect. Instead of attempting to measure the impact of the program's partners on development, Outcome Mapping concentrates on monitoring and evaluating its results in terms of the influence of the program on the roles these partners play in development.

In the IDRC context, defining outcomes as "changes in behaviour" emphasizes that, to be effective, development research programs must go further than information creation and dissemination; they must actively engage development actors in the adaptation and application. Such engagement means that partners will derive benefit and credit for fulfilling their development roles whereas development programs will be credited with their contributions to this process. With Outcome Mapping, programs identify the partners with whom they will work and then devise strategies to help equip their partners with the tools, techniques, and resources to contribute to the development process. Focusing monitoring and evaluation on changes in partners also illustrates that, although a program can influence the achievement of outcomes, it cannot control them because ultimate responsibility for change rests with its boundary partners, and their partners and other actors. The desired changes are not prescribed by the development program; rather, Outcome Mapping provides a framework and vocabulary for understanding the changes and for assessing efforts aimed at contributing to them.

Terminology

Boundary Partners: Those individuals, groups, and organizations with whom the program interacts directly to effect change and with whom the program can anticipate some opportunities for influence.

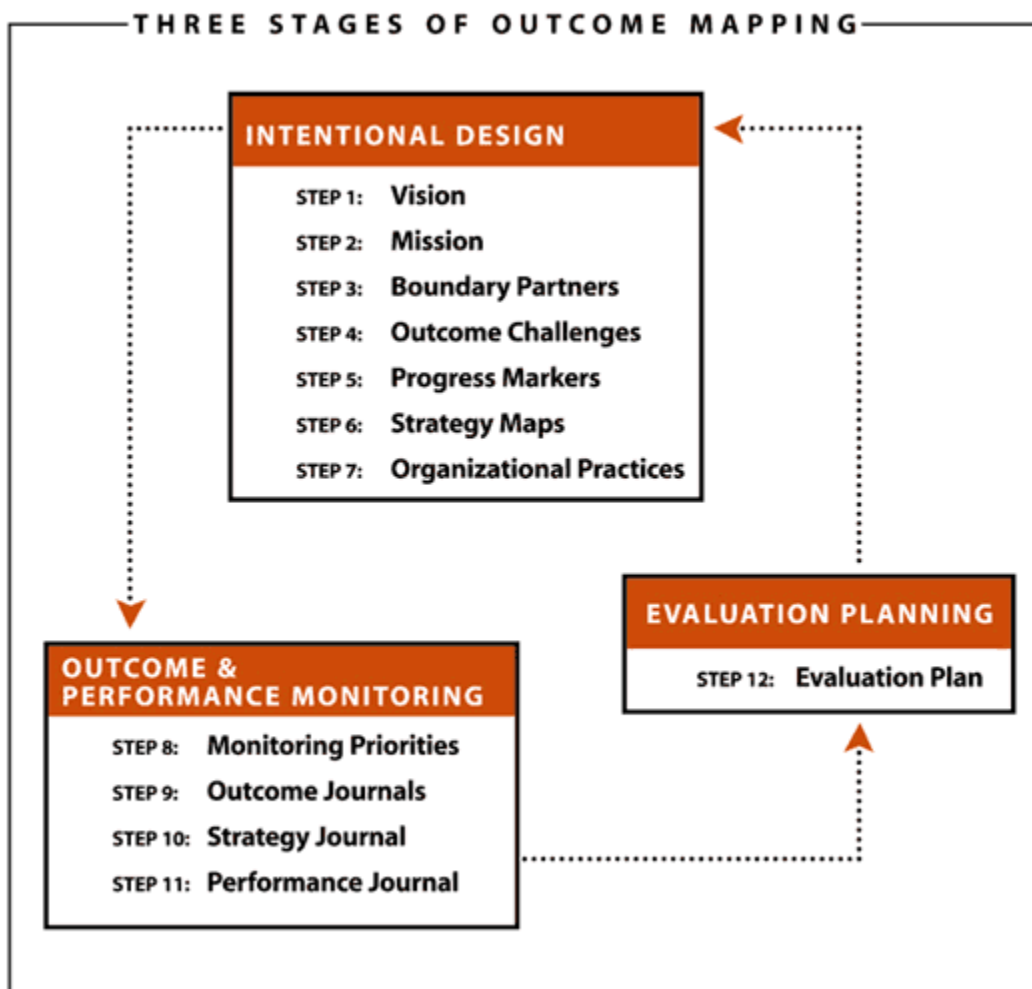
Outcomes: Changes in relationships, activities, actions, or behaviours of boundary partners that can be logically linked to a program's activities although they are not necessarily directly caused by it. These changes are aimed at contributing to specific aspects of human and ecological well-being by providing the boundary partners with new tools, techniques, and resources to contribute to the development process.

Progress Markers: A set of graduated indicators of changed behaviours for a boundary partner that focus on depth or quality of change.

Outcome Mapping

- Defines the program's outcomes as changes in the behaviour of direct partners
- Focuses on how programs facilitate change rather than how they control or cause change
- Recognizes the complexity of development processes together with the contexts in which they occur
- Looks at the logical links between interventions and outcomes, rather than trying to attribute results to any particular intervention
- Locates a program's goals within the context of larger development challenges beyond the reach of the program to encourage and guide the innovation and risk-taking necessary
- Requires the involvement of program staff and partners throughout the planning, monitoring, and evaluation stages

The Structure of Outcome Mapping



Integrating Program Learning, Reflection, and Improvement

Outcome Mapping provides a development program with the tools to think holistically and strategically about how it intends to achieve results. Ideally, monitoring and evaluation would be integrated at the planning stages of a program. However, this is not always the case, so Outcome Mapping has elements and tools that can be adapted and used separately. The full Outcome Mapping process includes three stages. For each stage, tools and worksheets are provided to assist programs to organize and collect information on their contributions to desired outcomes.

Outcome Mapping encourages a program to introduce monitoring and evaluation considerations at the planning stage and link them to the implementation and management of the program. It also unites process and outcome evaluation, making it well-suited to the complex functioning and long-term aspects of international development programs where outcomes are intermeshed and cannot be easily or usefully separated from each other. Focusing monitoring and evaluation around boundary partners allows the program to measure the results it achieves within its sphere of influence, to obtain useful feedback about its efforts to improve its performance, and to take credit for its contributions to the achievement of outcomes rather than for the outcomes themselves. The above diagram illustrates the three stages of Outcome Mapping and the twelve steps of an Outcome Mapping design workshop.

The first stage, Intentional Design, helps a program clarify and reach consensus on the macro-level changes it would like to support and to plan the strategies it will use. Outcome Mapping does not help a program identify programming priorities. It is only appropriate and useful once a program has chosen its strategic directions and wants to chart its goals, partners, activities, and progress toward anticipated results. After clarifying the changes the program intends to help bring about, activities are chosen that maximize the likelihood of success. The Intentional Design stage helps answer four questions:

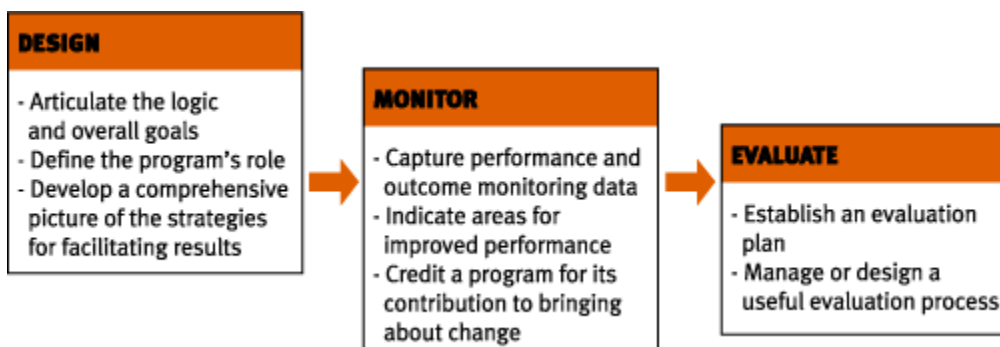


The second stage, Outcome and Performance Monitoring, provides a framework for ongoing monitoring of the program's actions in support of its boundary partners' progress towards the achievement of outcomes. The program uses progress markers, a set of graduated indicators of behavioral change identified in the intentional design stage, to clarify directions with boundary partners and to monitor outcomes (Outcome Journal). It uses a Strategy Journal (to monitor strategies and activities) and a Performance Journal (to monitor organizational practices) to complete a performance monitoring framework. This framework provides the program the opportunity and tools both to reflect on and improve performance and to collect data on the results of its work with its boundary partners. Whereas with the monitoring framework in Stage 2 the program gathers information that is broad in coverage, a strategic evaluation examines a strategy, issue, or relationship in greater depth.

The third stage, Evaluation Planning, helps the program set evaluation priorities so that it can target evaluation resources and activities where they will be most useful. An evaluation plan outlines the main elements of the evaluations to be conducted.

Using Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is usually initiated through a participatory workshop led by an internal or external facilitator who is familiar with the methodology. This event is geared to the perspectives of those implementing the program and focuses on planning and assessing the changes they want to help bring about. It is useful to include boundary partners in the initial workshop for input on the relevance, activities, and direction of the program. This workshop allows the group to reach consensus about the macro-level changes they would like to support and the strategies to be employed to do this. It also provides a basis for subsequent discussions with partners to negotiate program intentions and to help the program develop a monitoring system and establish an evaluation plan.



Outcome Mapping helps a program be specific about the actors it targets, the changes it expects to see, and the strategies it employs and, as a result, be more effective in terms of the results it achieves. It is particularly valuable for monitoring and evaluating development programs whose results and achievements cannot be understood with quantitative indicators alone but also require the deeper insights of a qualitative, contextualized story of the development process.

Outcome Mapping is a dynamic methodology that is currently being tested at the project, program, and organizational levels. *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*, by Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo, will be published in English in October 2001, and in French and Spanish in 2002. It explains the various steps of the approach and provides more detailed information on facilitating the design workshop, including worksheets and examples. Outcome Mapping remains a work in progress so we look forward to receiving your comments and suggestions.